

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5997

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 11644

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, TH, BM, MY

SUBJECT: HANDGUN EXPORTS TO THAILAND

REF: A. STATE 139594

B. RANGOON 1630

SUMMARY: PERSONAL WEAPONS LICENSED FOR EXPORT TO THAILAND AND SOLD THROUGH COMMERCIAL OUTLETS BASICALLY REMAIN IN COUNTRY AND ARE NOT TRANSSHIPPED TO ADJACENT COUNTRIES. THE DEMAND FOR HANDGUNS HAS BEEN STIMULATED BY BOTH A DECREASE IN LAW AND ORDER AND THE PASSAGE OF A LAW BY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AUTHORIZING THE PURCHASE AND USE OF HANDGUNS BY THAI PRIVATE CITIZENS. IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE DEMAND FOR HANDGUNS WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE IN VIEW OF DETERIORATING URBAN INTERNAL SECURITY. THE MISSION REMAINS RELUCTANT TO RECOMMEND RESTRICTIONS AT THIS TIME SINCE NO APPARENT CONTRAVENTION OF MUNITIONS CONTROL REGULATIONS IS EVIDENT. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE IMPORT SITUATION TO DETERMINE WHETHER AT SOME POINT U.S. WEAPONS LICENSED FOR EXPORT MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO THE FURTHER BREAKDOWN OF URBAN INTERNAL SECURITY. WILL ADVISE IF FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED.

END SUMMARY.

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1. EMBASSY CHECKS WITH BOTH PROVINCIAL POLICE AND BORDER PATROL POLICE SENIOR OFFICIALS SHOW THAT WEAPONS, PARTICULARLY HANDGUNS, CITED REF A, ARE NOW IN GREAT DEMAND AND ARE UTILIZED MAINLY WITHIN THAILAND BY PRIVATE CITIZENS FOR PERSONAL PROTECTION. THE THAI POLICE ARE CONVINCED THAT VERY FEW, IF ANY, HANDGUNS ARE TRANSSHIPPED OUT OF THAILAND TO ADJACENT COUNTRIES BECAUSE OF THE INCREASING LOCAL DEMAND FOR PERSONAL WEAPONS IN VIEW OF ESCALATING LAWLESSNESS IN BANGKOK AND OTHER URBAN AREAS. AS POINTED OUT IN REF B, THRIVING BLACK MARKETS IN ARMS WHERE WEAPONS SUCH AS RIFLES AND SHOTGUNS ARE EASILY AND CHEAPLY OBTAINED MITIGATES THE NEED FOR THAI COMMERCIAL OUTLETS TO RESHIP THESE WEAPONS TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.

2. INCREASED DEMAND FOR HANDGUNS HAS BEEN STIMULATED BY PASSAGE OF BILL BY NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON MAY 1, 1975, WHICH ALLOWS PRIVATE THAI CITIZENS TO PURCHASE AND LICENSE HANDGUNS FOR THEIR PERSONAL PROTECTION. THIS BILL WAS OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVED BY THE ASSEMBLY WITH ONLY ONE ASSEMBLYMAN VOTING AGAINST THE BILL.

3. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, SINCE OCTOBER 1973, THERE HAS BEEN A GRADUAL INCREASE IN THE BREAKDOWN OF THAI LAW AND ORDER, PARTICULARLY IN BANGKOK, WHERE INCIDENTS OF MAJOR CRIMES SUCH AS MURDER, ROBBERY, ASSAULTS, AND RAPE HAVE STEADILY INCREASED WITH THE POLICE BEING UNABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY COPE WITH THE INCREASED CRIME RATE. IN THE FACE OF THIS MOUNTING INSTABILITY AND THREAT, THE ORDINARY THAI CITIZEN HAS CHOSEN TO ARM HIMSELF IN AN EFFORT TO PROTECT HIS PERSON AND PROPERTY. THE DEMAND FOR HANDGUNS WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO ESCALATE SO LONG AS URBAN SECURITY CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. IT CAN ALSO BE PREDICTED THAT U.S. MADE HANDGUNS LICENSED FOR EXPORT TO THAI OUTLETS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE WILL BE PURCHASED AND USED BY THAI CITIZENS FOR PERSONAL SECURITY AND NOT TRANSSHIPPED OUT OF THAILAND. WHILE "ZIP" GUNS ARE READILY AVAILABLE HERE, THE ORDINARY THAI CITIZEN PREFERS THE U.S. IMPORT AND IS WILLING AND ABLE TO PAY THE PRICE FOR THE MORE SOPHISTICATED
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WEAPON.

5. COMMENT: THE AVAILABILITY OF HAND GUNS, COUPLED WITH THE NEW THAI LAW PERMITTING CITIZENS TO PURCHASE HAND WEAPONS, MAY WELL CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASING DESTABILIZATION OF INTERNAL SECURITY. THERE IS SOME RISK IN THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT FOR CRITICISM OF THE U.S. AS A SUPPLY SOURCE, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT AS YET BEEN

TAKEN TO TASK FOR THIS.

6. WE REMAIN RELUCTANT TO RECOMMEND RESTRICTIONS AT THIS TIME IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT NO APPARENT CIRCUMVENTION OF THE MUNITIONS CONTROL REGULATIONS IS TAKING PLACE, AND THE RTG, TO DATE, HAS NOT DEMONSTRATED CONCERN. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE IMPORT SITUATION, AND ADVISE IF FURTHER ACTION IS INDICATED.

WHITEHOUSE

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